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Beyond Global English: Motivation to Learn Languages in a Multicultural World: Introduction to the Special Issue

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ABSTRACT

This special issue takes a critical look at a largely uncharted area of language learning motivation – the motivation to learn languages other than English (LOTes) in an era of globalization and multilingualism. Most 21st century literature on motivation in SLA has focused on the learning of English, whose dominant status as a global language has significantly shaped current conceptualizations of L2 motivation in relation to notions of self and identity. In an effort to redress this balance, the articles in this special issue critically examine two key questions: (a) How far are current theoretical perspectives adequate to account for motivation to learn languages other than English? and (b) What impact does global English have on motivation to learn other second or foreign languages in a globalized yet multicultural and multilingual world? In examining these core questions across a range of socio-political and educational settings, this issue brings together broader sociological as well as individual-psychological perspectives on motivation to learn LOTes.

Keywords: global English; self-and-identity frameworks; individual-psychological and macro-sociological perspectives; multilingualism

In a recent systematic and comprehensive survey of L2 motivation research spanning the period from 2005 to 2014, Boo, Dörnyei, and Ryan (2015) highlighted the phenomenal growth in published studies in this field of inquiry. As they pointed out, this “unprecedented surge” (p. 145) far outweighs in volume the amount of research published in relation to other L2 learner characteristics and many areas of inquiry within SLA. Significantly, over 70% of the motivation studies surveyed during this decade were set in contexts where the focus was on learning English as the target language, thus providing incontrovertible evidence of a strong language bias in current theorizing and research in the L2 motivation field. In effect, with the rise of global English, it would seem that most 21st century literature on motivation in SLA has focused on the learning of English, seen by many today as a basic educational skill alongside reading, writing, and mathematics. Indeed, the dominant status of English as the must-have language of the world has contributed in no small measure to the conceptual reframing of L2 motivation in relation to internalized notions of self and identity, which have now become mainstream in our field. This reframing has represented a significant shift from the traditional theoretical focus on attitudes to external reference groups such as specific ethnolinguistic communities or cultures, and has been considerably shaped by the fact that English as a global language has become what might be called a ‘disembodied language’ (Pinner, 2016) transcending borders, cultures, and community boundaries.

TWO CORE QUESTIONS

This paradigm shift in the landscape of L2 motivation research came to particular prominence with the publication of Dörnyei and Ushioda’s (2009) anthology of conceptual and empirical papers on *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. In the space of just a few years since then, the field has seen a remarkable proliferation of volumes of papers on language learning motivation and self-and-identity perspectives in L2 learning (e.g., Apple, Da Silva, & Fellner, 2013, 2016; Csizér & Magid, 2014; Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015; Lasagabaster, Doiz, & Sierra, 2014; Mercer & Williams, 2014; Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011; Ushioda, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, however, in the majority of papers across all of these collections, the focus is on the learning of English. With such a strong bias on global English in the empirical exploration and theoretical analysis of L2 motivation, it is clear that other target languages are currently much less well-represented in L2 motivation research. Hence, one aim of this special issue is to

seek to redress this balance by bringing together a uniquely original set of theoretical and empirical perspectives on language learning motivation ‘beyond global English,’ where the attentional focus is on target languages other than the established lingua franca of the ‘global village.’

However, simply diversifying the language focus of L2 motivation research is not in itself the main purpose of this special issue. Rather, our mission is to take a critical look at this largely uncharted area of motivation to learn languages other than English (LOTEs) in the current era of globalization and multiculturalism, and to address two core questions in particular: (a) How far are current mainstream theoretical perspectives adequate to account for motivation to learn languages other than English? and (b) What impact does global English have on motivation to learn other second or foreign languages in a globalized yet multicultural and multilingual world?

The first question concerns whether we need theoretically differentiated approaches to the psychology of L2 motivation depending on the language of study, akin to the “two-tier” approach suggested by Dörnyei (2005, p. 119) in relation to motivation for learning the dominant global language versus other languages. More radically, the question asks whether some significant rethinking may be required, since current self-and-identity conceptualizations of L2 motivation at the individual-psychological level have been strongly grounded in analyses of global English learning contexts, and these conceptualizations and associated empirical findings are used in turn to develop recommendations for classroom practice and educational policy. To what extent are these conceptualizations and findings relevant or indeed appropriate to understanding and enhancing motivation when English is not the target language under focus? Do current mainstream perspectives need refinement or redevelopment to take better account of processes of motivation in relation to learning other target languages, and thereby provide more contextually-appropriate pedagogical insights and recommendations?

While this first core question is concerned with theoretical issues at the individual-psychological level, the second key question both sustains and expands this focus. By asking what impact global English has on the motivation to learn other languages in a globalized yet multilingual and multicultural world, we sustain the focus on the internal psychological dimension, addressing in particular the possibilities of motivational interactions or interferences when people are engaged in learning additional languages in parallel with L2 English. How do

processes of motivation for learning the dominant global language interact with processes of motivation for learning other languages, and to what extent are these interactions positive or negative? At the same time, this second question expands the focus beyond the individual-psychological dimension to a macro-sociological perspective by considering factors in the socio-political and educational environment that may interact with motivation to engage with language diversity and learn languages other than English. At this broader level, this core question is concerned with the pervasive discourses around English language globalization, as well as with matters of language-related policy and provision in particular educational environments, since such discourses and socio-contextual factors may have a significant bearing on people's motivation to develop skills in other languages. While this question addresses issues of language learning motivation (or lack of such motivation) particularly among those who are 'native speakers' of English, its critical reach is potentially much wider than this. For the impact of global English on motivation to learn additional languages (whether foreign, regional, minority or heritage) may equally be significant for those from other L1 backgrounds, and may be significant too for language provision and uptake in non-Anglophone regions of the world.

THIS ISSUE

All of the contributors to this special issue address one or both of these two focal questions. Immediately following this brief introduction to the core themes, two lead articles thematize the counterpoint between individual-psychological (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie) and macro-sociological (Ushioda) perspectives on motivation to learn LOTEs running through the special issue. With specific reference to the first core question, Zoltán Dörnyei and Ali Al-Hoorie critically examine the motivational foundation of learning languages other than English. They illuminate a number of aspects where this motivation diverges from motivation to learn English, and discuss how current conceptualizations of L2 motivation may thus fall short of adequately representing subtle motivational characteristics specific to the learning of LOTEs. With closer reference to the second focal question, Ema Ushioda critically discusses the largely negative impact of English language globalization on motivation to learn LOTEs from a macro-sociological perspective, highlighting the narrowly instrumentalist view of language learning promoted through current neoliberal discourses. As a more constructive approach to encouraging grassroots engagement with LOTEs, she argues in favour of promoting a less instrumentalist and more holistic view of

language learning as a process of expanding people's meaning-making repertoires as multilingual (rather than L2 expert) communicators.

These two lead articles are then followed by seven contributions from L2 motivation researchers who address one or both of the two focal questions with reference to new empirical data, new conceptual developments, or new analyses of recent empirical research, encompassing diverse geographical settings, learning contexts and target languages. The first three articles all focus on Anglophone settings. Amy Thompson analyses the motivations of university-level learners of LOTE in the United States, highlighting the significant motivational status of Spanish as target language in this context, as well as motivational variations relating to how multilingual learners perceive interactions between languages of study. In sharp contrast, Peter MacIntyre, Susan Baker, and Heather Sparling focus on the unique role of Celtic music in the motivation to learn Gaelic as heritage language on Cape Breton Island in Canada. They draw attention to the significance of deep-seated connections among learners and contexts in characterizing such motivation, epitomized in the proposed new concept of a 'rooted L2 self.' Focusing on the rather different Anglophone setting of the United Kingdom and taking a broader sociological perspective, Ursula Lanvers similarly highlights the significance of context in shaping motivation as she engages in a critical review of relevant research in a country where learning foreign languages is in sharp decline and has increasingly become a minority pursuit.

The remaining four articles focus on non-Anglophone settings. Maya Sugita-McEown, Yasuyo Sawaki, and Tetsuo Harada examine the case of Japanese university students learning a second foreign language alongside English. Using structural equation modeling, they integrate three self-and-identity theoretical frameworks to analyse students' motivation for learning LOTE, with a particular focus on contributing socio-contextual factors such as teacher support, parental encouragement, and the socio-political status of English in the Japanese education system. Drawing on his recent empirical work with students in Sweden, Alastair Henry explores the motivational self-systems of those learning two or more languages. Taking a complexity thought modeling approach, he develops a conceptual account of a multilingual motivational self-system comprising multiple self-guides, including an 'ideal multilingual self' transcending a person's L2-specific identities. The possible aspiration towards an ideal plurilingual identity features also in Vera Busse's analysis of attitudes to learning English and other languages among secondary school students across four European countries (Bulgaria, Germany, the Netherlands,

Spain). Working with a large dataset of qualitative responses to a survey, she discusses how the global status of English may have positive as well as negative effects on students' motivation to learn other languages, and highlights the significance of macro-contextual and micro-contextual factors in influencing this motivation. Focusing specifically on language learning motivation and attitudes in bilingual regions of Spain, David Lasagabaster engages in a critical review of research examining students' motivation to learn Spanish, local minority languages (Basque, Catalan, Galician), and English as the dominant foreign language. His analysis reveals a complex changing picture among the younger generation in relation to the revitalization of minority languages, together with the increasing impact of English on language attitudes and motivation in the Spanish multilingual context, particularly among the growing population of immigrant youth faced with learning Spanish, English, and minority languages.

The special issue concludes with a coda chapter in which Patsy Duff draws together the common themes from the nine articles and offers a critical commentary on emerging issues and their implications for further research as well as for language education policy and practice.

CONCLUSION

While the theoretical and empirical perspectives under focus in this special issue may primarily be of interest to the L2 motivation research field and contribute to advancing our thinking about the psychology of L2 motivation, the issues raised clearly have much wider resonance. At the time of writing this introduction, *Times Higher Education* has just published an article entitled "Do we need modern language graduates in a globalised world?" (Kelly et al., 2017) in which six academic linguists from the United Kingdom, continental Europe, the United States, and Australia offer their critical perspectives on the decline of foreign language learning in the current populist climate and in the age of English language globalization. In effect, motivation for learning LOTE is potentially a significant matter for all those who are concerned with promoting, supporting, and enhancing language learning beyond global English. The articles in this special issue will thus contribute to shaping and informing critical debate across our academic and professional communities.

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